THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) and (c) As a result of zero based budget exercise of the Government of India, the rates of subsidy under Rubber Plantation Development Scheme have been reduced from Rs. 18,000 per ha. in traditional areas and Rs. 22,000 per ha. in non-traditional areas to Rs. 12,000 per ha. and Rs. 16,000 per ha. respectively.

The subsidy for fertilizers and fungicides available under Productivity Enhancement Scheme has not been reduced.

Decline in Prices of Natural Rubber

5200. SHRI J. CHITHARANJAN: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that various measures taken so far has failed to stall the fall in prices of natural rubber;

(b) if so, the details thereof and reasons therefor; and

(c) whether Government will consider procuring 50,000 tonnes of natural rubber to stall the further fall in prices?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) and (b) As a result of various steps taken by the Government to arrest the decline in the prices of natural rubber, the prices have considerably improved in the last few months and are at present ranging between Rs. 3300-3400 per quintal.

(c) To further improve the domestic prices of rubber, Government have decided to continue the procurement of natural rubber upto 20,000 MT for supply against Advance Licence.

Embargo on Import of American Soda Ash

5201. SHRI R.S. GAVAI: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have put 'de facto embargo' on import of American Soda Ash as a result of a temporary injunction imposed by MRTPC in 1996;

(b) whether US Trade Representative has asked for lifting the 'embargo';

(c) if so, the details thereof; and